

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 IO-13 SR-02 ORM-03 CIAE-00 PM-07

H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01

SPC-03 SS-15 ACDA-19 DPW-01 AID-20 DRC-01 HEW-08

SCI-06 MED-03 AGR-20 EB-11 COME-00 /203 W

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R 141655Z SEP 73

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2995

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

USUN NEW YORK 783

CINCPAC

SECDEF

USSAG

USIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PHNOM PENH 9800

DEPT PASS AID/W

USIA FOR IEA

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI, MOPS, SREF, CB

SUBJECT: IMPACT OF BATTLE FOR KOMPONG CHAM

1. SUMMARY. KOMPONG CHAM IS A BADLY MAULED CITY. THREE EMBASSY OFFICERS AND CHMEDTC VISITED THERE TODAY AND ESTIMATE THAT AT
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LEAST TWENTY-FIVE PERCENT OF THE CITY HAS BEEN DESTROYED AND AP-

PROXIMATELY SIXTY PERCENT DAMAGED DURING THE MONTH-LONG BATTLE. THE ECONOMIC LIFE OF THE CITY IS HALTED, AND WHAT REMAINS OF THE CIVIL POPULATION STAYS INDOORS WHILE FANK MAINTAINS PRESSURE ON THE ONE REMAINING POCKET OF ENEMY RESISTANCE WHICH IS IN THE UNIVERSITY AREA. THERE IS A SERIOUS REFUGEE PROBLEM, GOVERNMENT FOOD STOCKS WILL GIVE OUT IN TEN DAYS UNLESS REPLENISHED, MEDICAL CARE IS DEFICIENT, THERE IS A CRITICAL SHORTAGE OF MEDICINES, AND CITY OFFICIALS FEAR THERE COULD BE AN OUTBREAK OF CHOLERA UNLESS PREVENTIVE MEASURES ARE TAKEN. THE MISSION IS TAKING URGENT STEPS TO ASSIST THE GKR IN DEALING WITH THESE PROBLEMS. END OF SUMMARY.

2. IN ITS UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPT TO TAKE KOMPONG CHAM, CAMBODIA'S THIRD LARGEST CITY, THE KHMER INSURGENTS (KI) FIRED ARTILLERY AND ROCKETS INDISCRIMINANTLY INTO THE CITY FOR MANY DAYS, CAUSING SEVERAL THOUSAND CIVILIAN CASUALTIES AND GREAT HUMAN SUFFERING. AERIAL OBSERVATION OF THE CITY REVEALS BLOCKS OF TOTALLY DESTROYED BUILDINGS, ESPECIALLY IN THE RESIDENTIAL AREAS ALONG THE RIVER FRONT AND IN THE SOUTHERN AND WESTERN SECTIONS OF THE CITY. WAREHOUSES AND OTHER WATERFRONT BUILDINGS AND MANY OTHER STRUCTURES THROUGHOUT THE CITY HAVE BEEN RIDDLED AND GUTTED. THE TEXTILE FACTORY, HOWEVER, IS SAID TO HAVE COME THROUGH RELATIVELY UNSCATHED, THE DEPUTY ASSISTANT COMMANDER OF THE AUTO-DEFENSE FORCE IN KOMPONG CHAM (A PROMINENT LOCAL CITIZEN ALREADY KNOWN TO US) SAID THAT THE KI FIRED ROCKETS AND ARTILLERY SHELLS POINT-BLANK INTO HOUSES, SO AS TO FORCE OUT THE RESIDENTS HIDING INSIDE. THOSE WHO SURVIVED WERE THEN ROUNDED UP, DIVIDED ACCORDING TO AGE, OCCUPATION, ETC. AND MARCHED OUT OF THE CITY. WHILE WE DO NOT YET KNOW HOW MANY CIVILIANS WERE FORCIBLY LED AWAY TO COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED AREAS ELSEWHERE, THEY MAY WELL EXCEED 10-15,000 PERSONS.

3. THERE IS A RUMOUR CIRCULATING IN KOMPONG CHAM THAT THE FAMILIES OF FORTY PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS WERE TAKEN TO NEARBY PHUM AND ROKOR AND EXECUTED. (THERE IS NO WAY AT PRESENT TO CONFIRM THIS.) SEVERAL RESIDENTS OF KOMPONG CHAM STATED THAT THE KI SANK AT LEAST SIX BOATS BETWEEN SEPTEMBER 6 AND 10, EACH CARRYING ABOUT 25 PEOPLE TRYING TO FLEE ACROSS TO THE EAST BANK OF THE MEKONG AT TONLE BET. ONE REFUGEE WOMAN TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER, HOWEVER, THAT WHEN THE KI CAME INTO HER VILLAGE ON THE OUTSKIRTS

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OF KOMPONG CHAM, THE PEOPLE WERE NOT HARMED. SHE SAID THAT THREE OF THE KI SPOKE KHMER POORLY.

4. THERE ARE TWO HOSPITALS IN KOMPONG CHAM, ONE CIVILIAN AND THE OTHER MILITARY. THE CIVILIAN HOSPITAL, THOUGH DAMAGED, IS NOW BEING USED TO HOUSE APPROXIMATELY 1,000 REFUGEES. MOST OF THE HOSPITAL PATIENTS WERE MOVED TO PHNOM PENH BY THE KHMER NAVY ON SEPTEMBER 12TH. THE MILITARY HOSPITAL WAS LARGELY

DESTROYED. SEVERAL OF THE WARDS WERE SUBJECTED TO ENEMY ARTILLERY AND B-40 ROCKETS AND ARE BURNED OUT. THE HOSPITAL WAS FILLED WITH MILITARY WOUNDED AT THE TIME OF THE ENEMY ATTACK. ALL REPORTEDLY WERE KILLED. CITY AUTHORITIES HAVE BULLDOZED A MASS GRAVE IN THE HOSPITAL COMPONG. THREE CLEARLY IDENTIFIABLE MILITARY AMBULANCES AT THE HOSPITAL WERE RIDDLED BY ENEMY FIRE. A KHMER RED CROSS AMBULANCE IN ANOTHER PART OF TOWN, A GIFT OF THE JAPANESE PEOPLE, WAS HIT BY TWO B-40 ROCKETS AT CLOSE RANGE. THERE WERE NO OTHER TARGETS OR SHELL HOLES IN THE VICINITY.

5. THERE ARE ONLY TWO MEDICAL DOCTORS LEFT IN KOMPONG CHAM, OF THE APPROXIMATELY FIVE OR SIX WHO WERE THERE BEFORE THE BATTLE BEGAN. THE ABSENCE OF THE OTHER DOCTORS HAS BEEN ATTRIBUTED VARIOUSLY TO KIDNAPPING BY THE ENEMY, WOUNDS, AND FLIGHT TO PHNOM PENH. MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT ARE CRITICALLY LOW, AND CITY AUTHORITIES FEAR THERE COULD BE AN OUTBREAK OF CHOLERA IF PREVENTIVE MEASURES ARE NOT TAKEN QUICKLY. KOMPONG CHAM NORMALLY CONSUMES 1,650 TONS OF RICE PER MONTH. THERE ARE 500 TONS OF RICE, OR ABOUT A TEN DAY SUPPLY, LEFT IN GOVERNMENT STOCKS. HOWEVER, NORMAL MEANS OF DISTRIBUTING FOOD IN THE CITY HAVE BROKEN DOWN.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 PHNOM PENH 9800

6. THE MILITARY ACTION IN AND AROUND KOMPONG CHAM HAS GENERATED UNKNOWN THOUSANDS OF REFUGEES. AN EMBASSY OFFICER VISITED FOUR REFUGEE CENTERS IN THE CITY-TWO IN PAGODAS, ONE IN A CINEMA AND ONE IN THE CIVILIAN HOSPITAL. THE REFUGEES ARE A PATHETIC GROUP AND MOST APPEAR TO BE IMMOBILIZED BY THE TRAUMA OF THEIR RECENT EXPERIENCES.

7. MAJOR GENERAL SAR HOR, GKR DELEGATE IN CHARGE OF THE FIRST MILITARY REGION AND KOMPONG CHAM PROVINCE, SAID HE WAS PRESSING THE GOVERNMENT FOR FURTHER ASSISTANCE. HE DISCUSSED HIS REQUIRE-
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MENTS THIS MORNING WITH FANK C-I-C MAJOR GENERAL SOSTHENE FERNANDEZ, CHIEF MEDTC BGENERAL CLELAND, AND KHMER NAVY COMMODORE SARENDY. GENERAL SAR HOR DESCRIBED THE VISIT TO KOMPONG CHAM YESTERDAY OF FANK SPOKESMAN AND 5TH POLITICAL BUREAU CHIEF, COL AM RONG, WITH TWENTY FOREIGN JOURNALISTS. ONE OFFICIAL IN KOMPONG CHAM NOTED SARCASTICALLY THAT NONE OF THE HIGH POLITICAL LEADERS OF CAMBODIA HAD YET COME TO KOMPONG CHAM, INCLUDING PM IN TAM WHO IS A NATIVE OF THE CITY, OR OTHER CABINET OFFICIALS CHARGED WITH SOCIAL AND REFUGEES MATTERS.

8. GENERAL SAR HOR DESCRIBED WITH SPECIAL SATISFACTION THE PERFORMANCE OF STUDENT VOLUNTEER "COMMANDOS" DURING THE HEIGHT OF THE BATTLE FOR KOMPONG CHAM. NUMBERING FIVE OR SIX AT THE BEGINNING, THE GROUP INCREASED TO OVER THIRTY AS THE BATTLE PROGRESSED. THE VOLUNTEERS TOOK UP ARMS AGAINST THE KI AND ALSO CARRIED HOT MEALS TO THE FANK SOLDIERS PREPARED BY REFUGEE WOMEN. THEY PROUDLY WEAR BLUE JEANS AND STEEL HELMETS WITH A BLUE BAND. (IT WILL BE RECALLED THAT STUDENTS WERE AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN THE SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE OF THE CITY AGAINST THE NVA/VC ATTACK IN 1970).

9. GENERAL SAR HOR AND THE FANK TROOP COMMANDERS SAY THEY CAN PUSH THE PERIMETER OUT FROM KOMPONG CHAM NOW THAT REINFORCEMENTS HAVE ARRIVED FROM PHNOM PENH. THE KI APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN SEVERELY BATTERED. THEY HAVE BEEN CLEARED OUT OF MOST OF THE CITY EXCEPT FOR A STUBBORN POCKET OF RESISTANCE REMAINING IN THE UNIVERSITY AREA. AT A CERTAIN POINT IN THE BATTLE, FANK UTILIZED ITS ASSETS EFFECTIVELY: KAF FLEW AIR RESUPPLY MISSIONS, BROUGHT IN

TROOP REINFORCEMENTS, EVACUATED WOUNDED, SOUGHT OUT TARGETS OF OPPORTUNITY; THE NAVY MOVED TROOPS, SUPPLIES, AND AMMUNITION UP FROM PHNOM PENH AND BROUGHT WOUNDED BACK; AND ARMY GROUND UNITS FOUGHT WELL IN CLEARING THE KI OUT OF THE REST OF THE CITY. FANK CAPTURED APPROXIMATELY 100 CHINESE-MADE AUTOMATIC RIFLES, 2 B-40 ROCKET LAUNCHERS, 3 CHINESE MACHINE GUNS, 3 CHINESE MORTARS, ONE 75 MM RECOILESS RIFLE, AND LARGE STOCKS OF AMMUNITION. IF FANK KILLED THE 2,000 TO 2,500 ENEMY TROOPS IT CLAIMS TO HAVE KILLED, THEN THE KI HAS SUSTAINED A MAJOR SETBACK. (NOTE: FURTHER MILITARY DETAILS ARE BEING PROVIDED SEPARATELY IN DAO REPORTS.)

10. ON AN URGENT BASIS WE ARE TAKING MEASURES, AND ARE ASSISTING THE GKR AND FANK TO TAKE MEASURES, AIMED AT PROVIDING RELIEF TO CONFIDENTIAL

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THE SHATTERED CITY, ITS REFUGEES AND ITS WOUNDED. WE ARE ALSO SUGGESTING TO THE GKR STEPS IT CAN TAKE TO TURN THE KOMPONG CHAM ATROCITIES INTO AN ANTI-GRUNK ISSUE BEFORE WORLD OPINION. A ROUND-UP OF THESE MEASURES WILL BE CABLED TOMORROW.

11. DEPARTMENT AND USIA MAY DRAW FROM ABOVE AS THEY SEE FIT FOR PRESS BRIEFINGS.

ENDERS

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